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## HOW THE SECRET OF MIDLAND AVENUE BECAME THE PRIDE OF MAIN STREET

(A history of Valiant)

It required but one year for Valiant, "The Secret Of Midland Avenue to become the pride of Main Street. The new low price compact, in its first year on the market, met all the objectives its designers had set for it.

First, Valiant won a national award for "outstanding automobile styling." Then, in a race of compact cars at Daytona Beach, it won the first seven places. Finally, proving economical operation to go with its style and performance, it beat both the other new economy cars in the Mobilgas Economy Run, averaging 27.29 miles per gallon.

In the market place, Valiant was an immediate success. A total of 180,189 cars were produced during the first model year, and as sales kept pace Valiant became the second most popular among the four new compact cars which were introduced during the year.

Valiant was first revealed as the "Secret Of Midland Avenue" in a special news conference on August 19, 1959. For 13 months, a task force of some 200 engineers had been working in secrecy at 403 Midland Avenue, Detroit, to create America's newest compact car. They had created a car which was completely new in concept, and which had a completely different automotive appearance.

For a brand new car in it first year, Valiant was amazingly trouble-free, Service Department officials of the Plymouth Division reported.

Behind this success was a rigorous testing program to assure that Valiant was at the highest peak of perfection and efficiency before it was placed on sale. A total of 32 hand-built prototype cars underwent every conceivable driving test, some of them designed to systematically destroy the car with usage much rougher than the normal car would get in a lifetime. In addition to the 32 test cars, 57 more experimental versions of Valiant engines were built and tested.

But even before the new car was brought to a stage of development where testing was possible, more than one million man hours of engineering work had gone into the project. And before that, there was painstaking studies of the potential future market, comprehensive surveys to determine a proper name for a new car, and detailed comparisons of various designs and specifications.

In the spring of 1957, Chrysler Corporation established a special car committee headed by Harry E. Chesebrough, Chrysler vice president and general manager of the Plymouth Division, who was then director of corporate product planning. The committee reviewed studies and plans for economy cars which had been previously developed with the corporation, going back as far as 1936.

"Within three months we had processed and sifted through recommendations and suggestions as to what type of automobile transportation we might offer the American public," Chesebrough reported later. "At this point we laid down certain objectives and requirements which had to be met in the design and engineering of the car."

They agreed the car must be:

1. Smaller than standard American cars, but in the finest engineering and styling traditions of Chrysler Corporation cars.

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2. Outstanding for its low initial price.
3. New and different. Not a scaled-down Plymouth.
4. Comfortable for a family of six.
5. Outstanding in its fuel economy.
6. An able accelerator and capable highway performer.
7. Larger than foreign imported cars because of the more demanding needs of the American motorist.
8. Capable of carrying the family luggage for a week-end trip.
9. Styled and built to offer high pride of ownership in appearance and interior appointments.

"Then we asked Central Engineering to combine two qualities ordinarily difficult to achieve in design -- by either American or foreign car makes. We asked for outstanding fuel economy along with agile performance," Chesebrough said.

"The net demand, that we made, was for an automobile that would be "all automobile" -- roadable, responsive, and fun for the whole family to ride and drive."

In July, 1958, when work on the Valiant was so far along that secrecy was essential, the "task force" of 200 engineers moved into the Midland Avenue plant. Security was so tight that many others within the Corporation believed the group was working on a highly confidential government project.

Thirteen months later, the "task force" completed its job, released its drawings and specifications to the manufacturing division, and closed up the Midland Avenue plant.

Chesebrough described the work of the special car committee and of the engineering group which created the Valiant as "the most satisfying of my whole business life."

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"This was an assignment to create a completely new car, both in design and style, and it was a dream-come-true for every engineer and stylist assigned to the project. I have never seen men work more intensely or with more devotion," he said. "We regard the creation of the Valiant as a classic product of team play in American business. The car was styled and engineered to sell. It was a sales-oriented designing job which gave full weight to aesthetic, technical, and merchandising objectives simultaneously."

The name Valiant was selected as a result of a comprehensive survey among 2,017 automobile owners in 15 cities in all sections of the country. The owners were interviewed from March 2 through March 9, 1959. From a list of several thousand names, five were selected for final evaluation: Chelsea, Columbia, Liberty, Revere, and Valiant. The determining factors as shown by the interviews in selecting Valiant for the name of the car were these: The name suggested desirable qualities, it conveyed the idea of being part of the prestige class, it was a name which people liked to say, liked the sound of and which contributes to pride of ownership, the name did not suggest other products, but rather it sounded as though it "belonged" on a car.

On October 21, 1959, after more than 750,000 miles of test driving of the Valiant prototypes, the division staged its first full-scale fuel economy test on public streets and highways.

The test was conducted by four standard, production-line cars, each driven at different speeds ranging from 45 to 65 miles per hour. Fuel economy ranged from 34.4 mpg to 25.7 mpg. Cities located at four points of the compass, and all about 600 miles from Detroit, were used as starting points for the four-car economy run. The cities were Marquette, Michigan (north); New York City (east); Nashville, Tennessee (south); and Des Moines, Iowa (west).

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All cars, each manned by a Chrysler Corporation engineer and a mechanic, terminated their runs at the Corporation's proving grounds at Chelsea, Michigan.

The Valiants were equipped with standard transmissions and used regular gas. From the instant the test run started, all cars were kept in gear with engines running until reaching the proving grounds. The four cars, which were driven a total of 2,403 miles at varying speeds, averaged 30.22 mpg. Speeds averaged from 38 to 60 mph.

Valiant went on public display for the first time on October 29, 1959, in dealerships all over the country. Public acceptance was immediate. Enthusiastic dealers sent hundreds of congratulatory telegrams along with orders for more cars. The car was a sales success from the start, and became an even greater demand during the remainder of the year.

Little more than a week after public introduction, on November 6, Valiant announced its line of station wagons. This helped round out the line of cars, and put Valiant in an even stronger marketing position.

"Just about everything you can think of went according to plan with Valiant in its first year," Chesebrough said. "We tried for a car which would combine quick performance with excellent fuel economy, and we got it. The styling awards, and the immediate public acceptance told us that the styling was right. The careful planning and the teamwork which went into developing this car certainly delivered results."